

PRESIDENT ENRIQUE BOLANOS MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BUSH
APRIL 10 - 2003

President Bush, Presidents of the Central American Republics:



Thank you, President Bush, for inviting my colleagues and me to the White House and to offer us an opportunity to express our concerns and views directly to you on the Free Trade Agreement issue.

Before discussing the Central American Free Trade Agreement, I will like to convey to you that my government is proud to have been one of the first to join the “Coalition of the Willing” in compelling Iraq to disarm. We admire the courage of the US troops and we reaffirm our offer to send a de-mining team in the near future to help in that effort in Iraq. I am asking my Congress´ to permit our military to travel abroad.

What CAFTA means to Nicaragua

In preparing for these meeting I asked myself two questions:

Why should there be a Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA)?

What are the risks CAFTA poses to Nicaragua?

Let me try to answer my own questions.

- CAFTA is not just a trade agreement for us: it is the centerpiece of our strategy for lifting Central America –specially Nicaragua out of decades of economic decline and impoverishment.
- But, for Nicaragua CAFTA is also a risk. It could be dangerously destabilizing in the short run, if we do not conclude the right kind of agreement.
- For CAFTA to realize its promise, it must take fully into account the fragility of our economy and the terrible poverty of most of the Nicaraguan population.
- Nicaragua needs substantial assistance to make the transition to free trade.
- Nicaragua is concerned –and we think this is a concern shared by the entire region– about how agricultural issues are to be dealt with in CAFTA. We depend so much on agriculture which is the backbone of our economy.
- Much of Central America has experienced wars, social and political upheavals, poverty, misgovernment, and corruption. We are all making progress in overcoming this legacy. By injecting needed reforms into our governmental structures, and by stimulating growth, development and opportunity, CAFTA can be a profound impetus towards democracy, stability and decency throughout the region.
- For CAFTA to realize a better future for thousands of Nicaraguans, we need an Agreement that takes into account the vulnerability of our economy, the poverty of our people, and the difficult passage to a stronger and more modern economy that a free trade agreement promises.
- We are counting on your good offices to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement to reinforce our good neighborly relations and to improve the lot of our people.